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FAULTS IN OUR CONSULAR SERVICE.

BY THE HON. ROBERT ADAMS, JR., RECENTLY U. S. MINISTER
TO BRAZIL.

THAT Americans are essentially a careful and progressive people is especially evidenced among our business men. The care with which they select their assistants and the promotion that usually follows efficient and faithful service show a keen appreciation of their self interest. But when they turn to political affairs, they apply an entirely different code of ethics to their treatment of the public business. Nowhere is this illustrated in a greater degree than in the consular service of the United States Government. The method by which the men are chosen for the positions, necessarily brings forth poor candidates, while the short tenure of office, which is generally limited to the presidential term, almost certainly so if a change of party takes place, and the meagre salaries paid—in some posts hardly sufficient to support life in a respectable manner—deters competent men from entering the service. It should also be remembered that there is no promotion for efficient service; that a consul cannot hope for a change of climate from a trying to a more healthy and genial one, after a given period of service, and that there is always the prospect of returning to the United States broken down in health, unfitted to resume private business, and without prospect of further employment at the hands of the Government.

Change of party causes little or no improvement in the *personnel* of the service. The evil lies in the system and not in partisan politics. In this case the degrading and demoralizing doctrine "To the victors belong the spoils" is really not so bad as the attendant and inveterate practice of distributing the spoils for supposed partisan services and according to supposed claims of

persons and localities with little or no regard to the qualifications of the appointees. Consuls are appointed to reside abroad for the purpose of protecting, facilitating and extending commerce between the countries which appoint them and the countries whither they are sent. Their functions, however, are not limited to commercial transactions. They stand as the protectors and advisers of their countrymen present in foreign lands ; they act as judges, notaries and administrators of intestates and of all property of such as have no legal representative ; they have to prevent frauds on the revenue, to notice infractions of treaty stipulations relating to trade, to advise their Government of new laws or regulations within their districts, to preserve the discipline of the commercial marine, to guard seamen from oppression, and they are expected to aid the destitute, for which purpose no funds are available except their meagre salary.

Consuls are also required to prepare from time to time reports upon matters affecting commercial, industrial, financial and agricultural interests, regarding labor, rate of wages, hours of work, and the condition of working people. In preparing these reports they are to bear in mind that the principal purpose to be served is the extension and encouragement of American industry at home and of her commerce abroad. Certainly these are duties sufficiently arduous and numerous to require for their faithful performance all the intelligence, honor, and patriotism of the best citizens of the Republic.

The United States has now reached a point in its development where it raises more cereals than it consumes, produces more goods than the people can wear, and more manufactured articles than the country needs. The necessity for foreign markets is pressing home to the people. Men may differ as to the method of securing these, whether under the open principle of Free Trade or the more conservative doctrine of Protection with Reciprocity, but all must agree that an intelligent extension of our commerce can only be effected through reliable information furnished by experienced observers. All people and every section of our country have an almost equal interest at stake, whether it be the farmer of the West seeking to learn the state of the flour market at Rio de Janeiro, the merchant in the East desirous of obtaining reports of the rubber yield at Para or of coffee at Santos, or the manufacturer of locomotives or of agricultural implements as to

the needs for their productions in Brazil or Argentine. These are but illustrations which could be amplified in every section of our own land and which reach to every country on the globe. That the present system does not furnish such information was evidenced by the acknowledged embarrassment of our State Department in negotiating the recent reciprocal treaties. So great was the *desideratum* that a new bureau was established to gather the missing data, special agents often being sent to obtain the desired information.

The importance of our consular service being recognized as well as the useful part it may be made to play in the hoped-for extension of the foreign trade, the question naturally arises: "How can it be improved?" Two great obstacles appear at the first step in that direction; first the ignorance of the majority of the people of the importance of the consular service as affecting their individual interests, and secondly the "spoils system" that has engrafted itself on our political parties. Let the people understand this question and they will soon insist that Civil Service rules shall be applied to this branch of the Government as they have been to the Post-office and other departments.

The Department of State prides itself upon the fact that below the Assistant Secretary no removals are made except for cause. Why could not this doctrine be extended to the consular service which is under its supervision? What a change would come over our consuls if they should be encouraged to hope for permanence in office, and have removed from their contemplation at every turn of the political tide the degrading spectacle of a basket full of bloody heads rushing at them for their own. Such conditions must either make many men cowards and time-servers or make them stolidly indifferent to the discharge of their duties. What incitement has a man so situated to make a close study of the politics, manners, alliances and commercial necessities of the people among whom he lives, and for making clear and compact statements of these in his reports to his government, for as soon as acquired he may be removed and the information be of no value to him.

Our consuls should be trained for their positions, and pass an examination on such subjects as the laws regulating shipping, the commercial treaties existing between their own and other countries, the laws relating to intestates, on the consular regu-

lations of the United States, and on such other subjects as relate to their duties. They should also be required to have a practical knowledge of French or of the language of the country to which they are to be sent. It will be demanded: "Where will such a specially educated class come from?" Once it is understood that the service is a permanent one, young men will prepare for it the same as they do for other professions, and in sufficient numbers to arouse competition. That this is not a matter of conjecture was fully established by the experience in Great Britain, when the examination for the civil service was thrown open to all, the number of applicants having increased the first year from five to fifteen thousand, and the character and ability of the applicants having proved as high as, if not better than, that of the selected applicants had been before.

To insure this, however, the salaries must be raised. How can a man be expected to live at Para, in Brazil, under an equatorial sun, exposed to malarial and yellow fevers, and deprived almost entirely of all social intercourse, for \$1,500 a year? or, even worse, at Santos, where the town was decimated by yellow fever during the past year, the victims including the United States vice-consul? Yet the importance of the first position to our country can best be stated by the value of the exports to the United States, which amount annually to \$7,000,000; while the annual export of coffee alone from the second port to our country is \$25,000,000. These cases could be amplified, but they are sufficient to illustrate the present state of affairs.

The false economy of the present system is displayed in the small amount of work performed by the incumbents of our consular posts. They work in proportion to their meagre salaries; no inducement of promotion or reward is held out for a good report. This false economy is further shown in the maintenance of so many unnecessary little posts in Canada and Europe. England has not half the number of consuls in all the United States that we have in the British Isles. These minor posts should be abolished and for the same money that we now spend we might have a well-paid and efficient consular corps.

Nowhere is the adage "the best is the cheapest" more forcibly illustrated than in the consular service. Had it been composed of the proper material no necessity could have arisen for the establishment of the South American Bureau; or, of sending

special commissioners to the foreign governments to make arrangements for their exhibits at the Columbian Exposition. With an experienced diplomatic corps and with consuls of long residence, speaking the language of the country in which they were stationed, our country would have been spared this great expense.

The consular service should also be made more homogeneous. As at present constituted there is no general supervision over the different consulates in the several countries. They should all be made subservient to the consul-general, or even better, as in the English service, to the Minister accredited to the country in which they are located. As it is some consuls report to the Legation, some to the consul-general, and others direct to the Department of State. This custom arose partly out of the desire to procure quicker mail facilities, but in many instances the postal service has been improved lately, and the cable and telegraph can be used for emergencies. The consuls-general could be dispensed with, or if retained should pay annual visits to the different posts in their districts, a duty at present only permitted in some countries once a year, and by special permission on application to the Department. A novel feature might be substituted to increase the efficiency of the consular service in the institution of several superintendents, whose duty it would be to visit the various consulates and inform the Department in relation to their true state, such as the proper location of the office, the state of the records, the correctness of accounts, as well as to ferret out abuses and inquire into any charge of misconduct, all of which can only be done by personal inspection. Owing to their remoteness, consuls are less under the eye of the appointing power and the espionage of the public press than any class of public officials.

The second division of our service, known as "Class C," composed of consuls who receive a small salary, but who are allowed to engage in private business, should be eliminated. One of the Secretaries of State in his report said "in the greater number of cases the place is sought for chiefly for the advantages and the influence it will give to extend the commercial affairs of the officer." How can such dual interests be attended to with impartial service? The official duties must often conflict with personal gain, and the routine of the office is sure to suffer under pressure of private affairs. The temptation will exist to with-

hold in their reports commercial or other information detrimental to their own business, and, in consequence, those at home suffer whose very interests the consuls are supposed to represent. How can it be expected that a merchant will attend to instructions having a direct tendency to injure the business which he is conducting?

It is a sad truth that the respect in which the people of our country hold their public servants has been falling off during the last thirty years. How can it be otherwise when it is recognized that places in the public service are obtained by patronage and favoritism? How different it would be were it recognized that a consular appointment became the reward of personal merit and that the official position was itself evidence of good reputation and capacity proved in open competition. Our consular service should be made to rank socially with our army and navy. A pride would then attach to its membership.

The practice of sending mere influential partisans to even the humblest offices in foreign ports has ceased on the part of every European government. The United States stands alone in continuing the unwise old practice. The older nations have aroused themselves for the international war of races and states for the commerce of the world, and as personal rights and interests become more important and sacred the different political communities of the world become more convinced of the necessity of having competent representatives to foster and to protect them.

The United States, however, seems indifferent to the improvement of her consular service, and is apparently unwilling even to follow in the footsteps of her sister nations, but the present effort to extend our foreign trade will be terribly hampered, if not made altogether futile, unless a companion movement is made to improve our consular service.

ROBERT ADAMS, JR.